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SUBJECT: The Ambassador's January 31 Call on Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung

Ref: A) Hanoi 156; B) Hanoi 254 and previous

1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: The Ambassador met for 75 minutes January 31 with Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. Describing his satisfaction with the bilateral relationship's progress over the past ten years, DPM Dung said his Government is willing to have a dialogue with the United States on any issue of mutual interest, called on the United States to reverse its Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation for religious freedom violations and expressed the GVN's hope to reach a bilateral WTO deal by the time Vietnam's Prime Minister visits the United States (in June 2005, according to the GVN request in Ref A.)

2. (SBU) Summary and Comment, cont'd: Responding to the Ambassador's calls for progress in a number of commercial projects, DPM Dung said that Vietnam would like to close deals on the Boeing 7E7s and Vinasat (Lockheed-Martin), but that the commercial agreements have to be "mutually beneficial." On Tricore, Dung said that the GVN's position is that Tricore had agreed to pay for the project design in the event that it was rejected, and, because the GVN decided that the design was not feasible, Tricore was responsible for the costs. On U.S. MIA recovery teams' access to the Central Highlands, DPM Dung stated in familiar terms the GVN's commitment to cooperating with the United States. On facilitating passport issuance to Visas-93 (Montagnard follow-to-join) families, DPM Dung asked the Ambassador to work with MFA on this issue. DPM Dung had no response to the Ambassador's request for his assistance in advancing counternarcotics operational cooperation. During his meeting with the Ambassador, DPM Dung was in command of his brief and comfortable discussing a wide-range of issues. Currently the senior of three Deputy Prime Ministers, Dung is regarded as a possible successor to Prime Minister Phan Van Khai. End Summary.

3. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/C, made his introductory call January 31 on Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung, Americas Department Deputy Director General Pham Van Que and Americas Department officer Le Chi Dung were also present. The Ambassador opened the 75-minute meeting by remarking on the considerable strides the U.S.-Vietnam relationship has made over the past ten years, which has led to new cooperation on HIV/AIDS prevention and care, expanded educational exchanges through the Fulbright Program and the Vietnam Education Foundation, and cooperative work on avian influenza. There has also been some progress in building the bilateral military-to-military relationship. However, much work remains to be done in this and other areas.

4. (SBU) The U.S.-Vietnam trade and economic relationship is the foundation of the overall bilateral relationship, but we need to continue to strengthen this foundation, the Ambassador continued. Both sides are working hard to reach a bilateral WTO accession agreement, but we are concerned that the necessary WTO legislation will not make it through Vietnam's National Assembly by the end of the year. In addition, the United States and Vietnam can further strengthen their economic ties through cooperation in the areas of transparency and anti-corruption. As the Ambassador told Minister of Home Affairs Trung on January 28 (septel), anti-corruption and good governance are fields in which the United States can help Vietnam. Furthermore, the United States hopes that, in the wake of the initiation of United Airlines' service to Vietnam, Vietnam Airlines will also begin service to the United States, but, to do this, Vietnam's civil aviation authority needs to make changes to raise Vietnam up to ICAO standards. The United States can also help with this, the Ambassador said.

5. (SBU) Outside trade and economics, human rights and religious freedom are issues of great importance to the American people, and the United States and Vietnam will have to face our differences squarely. We were very pleased with the recent Tet Amnesty, which included a number of persons of concern (Ref B), the Ambassador said.

16. (SBU) DPM Dzung responded that the Party, State and people of Vietnam want to see further growth in the relationship with the United States in all areas, such as trade and economics, science and technology, health, education and defense. Well-rounded U.S.-Vietnam ties will serve the interests of peace and development both regionally and globally. In short, Vietnam "always wants" to build stable, long-term and mutually beneficial relations with the United States, DPM Dzung averred.

17. (SBU) For these reasons, Vietnam is "very glad" that the bilateral relationship has grown as well as it has in so many different fields. On the occasion of this year's commemoration of ten years of normalization, DPM Dzung expressed his hope that both countries will take stock of how far they have come over the past decade, commit to building further on existing building blocks and endeavor to remove obstacles to advancing relations. Both sides must work hard to make this year's "celebrations" a success. "As scheduled," Prime Minister Phan Van Khai will visit the United States in June, and this visit will send a message to the peoples of both countries about how much we value the relationship and how successfully we have "overcome the sad interlude that perhaps did not have to happen," DPM Dzung opined. To make the visit a success, both sides will have to work closely together, and DPM Dzung expressed his hope that both sides can prepare carefully and well. To that end, the February 3-5 visit to Vietnam of NSC Senior Director for Asia Michael Green is a good thing.

18. (SBU) With regard to the issues of human rights and religious freedom, Vietnam has experienced "so much pain and many losses" during wartime, and Vietnam's leadership "always wants to bring happiness, freedom and democracy to our people," DPM Dzung said. Vietnam and other countries have different views about human rights and religious freedom, which is understandable considering cultural and historic differences. DPM Dzung agreed with the Ambassador's earlier remark that the United States and Vietnam have to address these issues (and all others) on the basis of mutual respect and dialogue. To foster mutual understanding, Vietnam is "willing to conduct a dialogue" with the United States and others on "issues of mutual interest," such as human rights and religious freedom. However, Vietnam hopes that the United States and others will "remain calm in responding to any possibly distorted information" that could be harmful to our interests, DPM Dzung said.

19. (SBU) In spite of progress in bilateral relations, Vietnam is "unsatisfied" with its designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations. Vietnam also is not pleased with the recent passage in the U.S. House of Representatives of the Vietnam Human Rights Act. These actions are not in the interests of the bilateral relationship. For the sake of long-term stability, Vietnam hopes that the United States will take action to "reverse these moves," Dzung said.

110. (SBU) To make this year's anniversary "useful," the United States and Vietnam will have to achieve significant results in their WTO negotiations. Vietnam is well aware of the support of U.S. leaders in this regard and hopes the same is true for those at the working level. To accede to the WTO by the end of 2005, Vietnam hopes to complete its WTO negotiations with the United States "before the Prime Minister's visit to Washington," the Deputy Prime Minister concluded.

111. (SBU) In response, the Ambassador expressed optimism that both sides will continue to work very hard to advance relations. On the issue of a dialogue on human rights and religious freedom, the key is not just dialogue for dialogue's sake, but a dialogue that leads to concrete progress. This is what the United States has been seeking. We fully recognize that Vietnam must operate within its legal system and in the context of its socio-economic position, but we also believe that Vietnam can do more to advance human rights. The Vietnam Human Rights Act passed by the House reflects the concern of Members and their constituents, the American people. On the question of reversing the CPC designation, this is an issue that the Ambassador will raise in broad terms with VFM Le Van Bang on February 1 (septel), leaving a more detailed presentation to NSC Senior Director Green during his February 4 talks in Hanoi, the Ambassador said.

112. (SBU) Reaching a bilateral WTO agreement in time for the Prime Minister's visit will require hard work, the Ambassador continued. To set the stage for a successful PM visit and positive outcomes for both the WTO talks and the Congressional permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) vote, it would be useful to see progress in a number of major commercial deals, such as the Boeing 7E7, Vinasat and the Ministry of Finance's TABMIS project. Additionally, there are concerns about the GVN's failure to deal with the

Tricore issue, which we have raised before. The two sides need to work together to resolve this, and the Ambassador will raise this matter with the Minister of Transportation February 1 (septel). Progress on issues related to tariffs and the special consumption tax on automobiles, in addition to licenses for American insurance companies, will also help to set the stage for the PM's visit and the other tasks ahead of us, the Ambassador stressed.

113. (SBU) Turning to the issue of fullest possible accounting for U.S. missing personnel, the Ambassador asked for the Deputy Prime Minister's assistance in facilitating U.S. investigation and recovery teams' access to the Central Highlands provinces of Kon Tum, Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Dak Nong. It appears that the reluctance of local officials in these areas is the obstacle to U.S. MIA teams' access. (Note: At this point, in an aside to DPM Dzong, AFM Hung said in Vietnamese that when DASD Jennings visited the Central Highlands, he also raised this request to provincial officials. AFM Hung told DPM Dzong that there is perhaps no problem in agreeing with this request, adding that the GVN agrees in principle. However, the GVN needs to collect more information before proceeding. End Note.) Additionally, the United States hopes for progress in signing a contract to allow a medevac helicopter to be available for injured personnel involved in the MIA field operations, both U.S. and Vietnamese, the Ambassador said.

114. (SBU) Another issue requiring our attention is U.S.-Vietnam counternarcotics cooperation, the Ambassador continued. Although the bilateral counternarcotics agreement has yielded progress in a number of areas involving training and capacity building, we have yet to see any operational cooperation. It seems that Vietnamese security personnel are not willing to work with the United States on this important issue. However, the United States and Vietnam need to work together to put a halt to drug money flowing between the two countries and to stop drugs that transit Vietnam on their way to the United States, Canada and elsewhere. The Ambassador expressed his hope that the Deputy Prime Minister could encourage Vietnam's security services to cooperate with the United States.

115. (SBU) Finally, the Ambassador sought DPM Dzong's assistance in facilitating the issuance of passports to Montagnard families who are attempting to travel to the United States on the Visas-93 program to join their family members already there. Some families, particularly in Dak Lak Province, have not been able to apply for passports, and this could become a problem bilaterally if it generates publicity in the United States, the Ambassador noted.

116. (SBU) Responding to the Ambassador's points on pending commercial projects, DPM Dzong said that any and all commercial deals have been concluded on the basis of Vietnamese law and "mutual benefit" to both sides. On the Boeing 7E7, Vietnam "wants to conclude a deal," but the terms of the contract are still "not beneficial" to Vietnam and require further negotiation. Furthermore, Vietnam wants to be able to acquire a Lockheed-Martin satellite for Vinasat, but, again, the conditions must be beneficial to both sides both in terms of price and technical conditions. This is something that DPM Dzong had told the president of Lockheed-Martin. Vietnam knows that Lockheed-Martin's technology is state of the art, but if the price is too high and the "orbit is not reasonable," then it will not be beneficial to Vietnam.

117. (SBU) On Tricore, DPM Dzong said that Tricore agreed with the Ministry of Transportation that Tricore would bear the expenses for the project design if the project were not approved. After the project was designed and submitted, the GVN decided it was not feasible because it required too much land allocation and called for toll collection that would "last too long." Vietnam wants U.S. investment because of American technology and commercial experience, but the terms must be mutually beneficial.

118. (SBU) Turning to the question of access to the Central Highlands for MIA recovery activities, DPM Dzong said that Vietnam's policy regarding this humanitarian issue has been consistent and that the GVN will continue to do everything it can to "bring the remains of U.S. soldiers back to their homeland." AFM Hung said that DASD Jennings had secured an agreement with provincial officials to move forward with activities in the Central Highlands. The Ambassador rejoined that, during recent discussions on this year's work plan, we heard that work in the Central Highlands would not be possible. DPM Dzong said that the main issue is that the GVN will do whatever it can to facilitate this humanitarian endeavor and that the two sides' respective MIA offices should remain in close contact.

119. (SBU) On the issue of passports for Visas-93 cases, DPM Dzong asked that the Ambassador work with the MFA on this. On the broader Montagnard issue, the GVN has ongoing

concerns about separatist elements within the Montagnard community, and this separatist movement has dated back to the days of the Vietnam War when the United States supported the southern regime's efforts to quell FULRO's attempts to establish Montagnard self-rule. After reunification, Vietnam's consistent policy has been not to allow self-rule. FULRO has since disbanded and fled to Cambodia and the United States, where, under the guise of the Montagnard Foundation, it continues its efforts to form a Montagnard state. DPM Dzong urged the USG not to support the activities or goals of groups such as the Montagnard Foundation.

120. (SBU) The United States fully supports the territorial integrity of Vietnam and does not support the efforts of separatist movements, the Ambassador responded. The Visas-93 issue is simply a humanitarian effort to reunite families. DPM Dzong concluded that the GVN would work with the USG on this matter.

121. (SBU) Comment and Bio Note: The senior of three Deputy Prime Ministers, Dzong is responsible for anti-corruption efforts and crime prevention, construction and industry, posts and telecommunications, agriculture, transportation, state-owned enterprise reform and other areas. In the economic sphere he has been associated with several difficult issues including Vietnam's auto development policy and Tricore. During his meeting with the Ambassador, Dzong was fully in command of his brief and comfortable discussing a wide-range of topics. A native of southern Vietnam, Dzong is ambitious and regarded to be a possible successor to Prime Minister Phan Van Khai. During a recent discussion with the Ambassador, Vice Foreign Minister Le Van Bang indicated that DPM Dzong is an influential contender and someone to watch. End Comment and Bio Note.

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